



## Using Community Health Advisors to Encourage Women to Obtain Cancer Screening Services

### Public Health Problem

In 2000, nearly 2,700 women were diagnosed with breast cancer in Alabama. In selected counties, there were more breast cancer deaths among African American (30/100,000) than among white (20/100,000) women.

### Evidence That Prevention Works

Mammography is the most effective method for detecting breast cancer early. Timely mammography screening could prevent 15%–30% of all deaths from breast cancer among women aged 40 or older. Additionally, detecting precancerous lesions by a Pap test and treating them can prevent cervical cancer and therefore prevent virtually all cervical cancer deaths.

### Program Example

Supported by CDC, the University of Alabama at Birmingham Breast and Cervical Cancer Coalition involves a variety of community-based, religious, grassroots, and health care organizations that serve the target population. The community action plan is designed to reduce disparities in breast and cervical cancer screening and outcomes between African American and white women through the use of community advisors. Core working groups of community health advisors, nurses, and church representatives disseminate information to support, encourage, and help women obtain cancer screening services and navigate the health care system. This approach is based on the Multilevel Approach Toward Community Health (MATCH) framework. Using health advisors, MATCH seeks to eliminate barriers that women face when trying to access health services.

### Implications

Using community-based health advisors as agents for behavioral change lends credibility to interventions to reduce the risk for breast and cervical cancer and increases the reach of the program in the community. This approach can extend lifesaving prevention programs and screening services across cultural divides to communities that would not likely be reached by traditional means.

### Contact Information

University of Alabama  
1717 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue South #728 • Birmingham, Alabama 35294-4410  
Phone: (205) 934-4307